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News Release ~ Communiqué

Sheila Finestone launches anti-racism campaign

OTTAWA, March 20, 1995 - "A country built in diversity cannot ... allow racism, hatred and bigotry to take root in its soil," Sheila Finestone, Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), declared in the House of Commons this afternoon. "To do otherwise would be to jeopardize the social peace for which Canada is envied around the world."

Speaking on the United Nations-proclaimed International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, she stated that the task involved providing access to racial and cultural minorities to education, jobs and social services and also "freedom from hatred and harassment."

Mrs. Finestone noted that Canada was the first western world country to commemorate this day. It has done so since 1989 and the Government has worked with institutions throughout the country to combat racism. Canada's anti-racism program comes under the multiculturalism mandate of the Department of Canadian Heritage. An Omnibus survey of 1,000 Canadians in 1992 indicated that 75 per cent felt that the federal government should help in fighting racism.

The March 21 campaign of the Department is designed to raise the awareness of Canadians against the dangers of racism and racial discrimination. The Department of Canadian Heritage works with private and public organizations to spread the message and to demonstrate ways of combatting racism.

Posters, buttons, Teachers' guides and fact sheets are distributed through Enquiries Canada. Materials are available by calling 1-800-279-2544 or TDD 1-800-465-7735 or faxing (613) 941-5992. The posters will be used in malls across the country, bus shelters, and interior subway cars in Montreal and Toronto. The Department also developed 90- second English and French advertisements for use in 600 theatres across the country. The advertisements, which began March 17 and will run for four weeks, encourage people to reflect on the theme, "Put Yourself in the Other Person's Shoes."

Radio public service announcements in both official languages will be made available to communities throughout the country. The Department will only produce these announcements. All air time will be donated during the campaign period and throughout the rest of the year. In addition, material will be made available to the mass media as well as specialized media, such as youth magazines.

The Teachers' Guide, written by teachers for teachers, will offer activities to encourage students to think about the issues and to build an inclusive community. The Department has also prepared an Information Kit for government departments and non-governmental organizations which is designed to help prepare workshops, presentations, film or panel discussions on the subject.

"Historically speaking, this country represents a coming together of many peoples and traditions - many different peoples, many different traditions," Mrs. Finestone declared. "And it is because we were and are so different in our backgrounds and our beginnings that Canada has learned, over time, to place an extraordinary premium on neighbourliness, civility and mutual acceptance."

She said, however, that racism and racial discrimination do exist in Canadian society. "The challenge is not to assimilate this diversity into a simple mould but to harness it for the common good," she asserted.

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